

ROBERT S. MARX LECTURE

TRANSFORMING INTERNATIONAL POLITICS: AN AMERICAN ROLE FOR THE POST COLD WAR WORLD

*Lea Brilmayer**

Most of us find the events of the last five or six years nothing short of astounding. It is not simply that the Cold War has ended, but that it ended so fast and with so little resistance. Already it has become difficult to explain to students in international relations classes the attitudes of authors who wrote just eight or ten years ago. Some of these students were only starting college or were still in high school when the Berlin Wall came down, and in the years prior to that, the Soviet Union had already started its fundamental transformation.¹ What will the world be like in ten more years? How will we explain the fears and foibles of the current generation, let alone those of the generations preceding us?

Observers in the West have gone through several distinct psychological phases in their struggle to adjust to changing world circumstances. The first reaction was one of euphoria and relief—not so much an intellectual reaction as emotional. We could hardly believe it when the East German government simply stopped—almost overnight—its efforts to prevent movement across the border into West Germany, when protestors danced on the ruins of the old Berlin Wall, and when one eastern European dictatorship after another fell at the hands of popular and largely peaceful revolutions. Those who watched will always remember the elation and excitement that swept across this country during these events. For those too young to remember, it may never be possible really to explain the emotional reaction of our country.

* Professor of Law, New York University School of Law. The author wishes to thank Catherine Anderson, N.Y.U. Law School Class of 1995, for her research assistance.

1. The Berlin Wall fell in November 1989; Germany was reunited in October 1990. Bulgaria's relatively peaceful revolution occurred in 1990, with free elections being held in June of that year. In Czechoslovakia, the Communist party fell from power in late November of 1989; Hungary had declared itself a republic the month before on the 33rd anniversary of the Hungarian revolt of October 23, 1956. The Poles elected their first non-communist premier in August of 1989. The Romanian revolution was more violent, but nonetheless rapid; in December of 1989 Ceaucescu was removed from power by a combination of Romanian army units and civilian protestors. The Soviet Union itself dissolved at the end of 1991, leaving the transition complete.

The second phase was a bit more sedate, but still enthusiastic. Suddenly, we decided that we had "won" the Cold War. Democracy had won; capitalism had won; and overall, the United States had won. The Soviet economic and political systems had been proven inferior to our own. We viewed the United States as a model for the rest of the world. As one nation after another set up various forms of democratic capitalism, we basked in the self-congratulation typical of self-anointed leaders. We were no longer merely the "leaders of the free world"—a phrase that most liberals had always found enormously uncomfortable, in part because of its employment by conservatives bent on intervention in Third World politics—but were rather leaders of the entire world. Furthermore, we saw ourselves as leaders chosen by the voluntary decisions of people in other countries and by the world press.

In part, this wave of self-congratulation evolved from the role that we felt we had been selected to fill in international politics. We thought that our political and economic system became a model and that our leadership was suddenly unchallenged in world diplomacy. The United Nations's Security Council was no longer artificially blocked by Soviet obstructionism; therefore, the way was clear for us to exercise our "natural" leadership role over other nations. If the first phase of this changing world order is best exemplified by the fall of the Berlin Wall, the second phase is best exemplified by the Persian Gulf War. The United States confidently stepped in to run a world that overwhelmingly, and we thought appropriately, looked to it for guidance.

The third phase, unfortunately, is best exemplified by Somalia. The United States was shocked to find that removing the obstructionism of the Soviet Union did not make leadership in world politics costless and trouble free. We now realize that many other sources of resistance to American domination remain and that while we may, in theory, have the power to dominate the globe, doing so will typically involve a commitment that we may not be willing to make and a price that we are unwilling to pay. Perhaps we thought that our having bested the Soviet Union and Iraq would so impress the Aidids and Karadziks of the world that they would step in line if we just shook our finger. That might have been true if those factions had been convinced that we really meant it. However, given their much greater stake in the local concerns in which they were involved, we should not have made such assumptions. At any rate, they were not impressed, and they were right.

Where do we stand now? Specifically, what is the current psychological climate? It is always hard to choose one element of a complex scene as paradigmatic, but we might state the general mood this way:

the end of the Cold War has made a difference; we are much more inclined to assume that we can get what we want; but we are also aware that there will be a cost. Thus, we want to save our resources and ration our energy so that we spend them only on those things that matter most to us. The difference between our current frame of mind and our initial euphoria is that we now realize the price of our endeavors. The difference between our current frame of mind and our enthusiasm for the foundation of a new world order is that we are only willing to incur costs if the benefits will be ours specifically.

This last difference is the focus of this article. I will contrast two different approaches to the American role in this post-Cold War world. I will refer to these roles as "public citizen" and "private individual." After the Cold War, the United States recognized itself as a public citizen with certain responsibilities incumbent upon it. These responsibilities came along with the opportunities for national aggrandizement that the end of the Cold War presented. For example, during the Gulf War, we recognized a role as public citizen, albeit with an overly optimistic view of what that role entailed. The self-congratulatory rhetoric of American foreign policy during that time period was arrogant and annoying. However, the air of American *noblesse oblige* had an element of truth to it. The American role was unique and carried with it unique responsibilities.

When the costs of playing public citizen became apparent, however, the United States retreated to the role of private individual. The foreign policy debate in Washington today is dominated by individuals who think that the United States is entitled to be as selfish as any other nation in the world. These individuals believe that we have no general responsibilities to the world at large. They do not think, however, that the United States is only as able to get its will as any other nation; they are happy that this is not the case. Yet, they believe that the United States is entitled to reserve for itself any benefits that flow from its ability to dominate world politics. In their world view, the United States's power to influence world events is a private, not public, good.

The rapidity with which we move from one perception of the American role to the other is surprising. Only a few years have elapsed between the era of Persian Gulf interventionism and our post-Somalian isolationism. When leadership seems to suit our selfish national objectives, we think that other nations should automatically recognize our status as a world power. When isolationism suits us better, we reverse our course. The combined effect of this rapid shift from our role as public citizen to private individual is apparent. We are trying to reap the benefits that come with our solitary superpower status without paying a price.

It is far from clear, as a purely strategic matter, whether it is possible to have it both ways. A country gains respect from other nations—and thus, the opportunity for leadership—by playing a public role even when that role is not to that country's advantage. In international and domestic politics, others support your actions only because they have found your leadership acceptable in other cases, and acceptable means "of benefit to the community at large." Although that is not the main point of this article, I think that it should be of serious concern to American policy makers. Leadership potential is like any other asset: the time will come when the United States will want the option to lead, and it would be unwise to let the option slip away because it temporarily is burdensome.

My main point is actually about ethical responsibility itself, the moral rather than the strategic issue. Those who think that international morality is a contradiction in terms will find much of the following argument naive and unrealistic. However, because I have addressed that position in other articles, I will not make its refutation a central object here.² The following discussion is addressed, instead, to those who are at least open to the idea that ethical notions have some role in global politics. Most people are open to these considerations even if their international ethics consist of a rather minimal set of human rights, sovereignty rights, or the rules of war. I believe that special powers carry special responsibilities. Specifically, the United States may have a different set of rights and duties than other nations, and we must think about what those special duties include. If one believes that there are potential justifications in certain circumstances for a special right to lead,³ that special right must entail certain obligations.

There are three parts to the discussion. Part I analyzes the argument that much of the confusion about America's current role in world politics stems from the question of whether its role is that of a public citizen or private individual. Part II argues that, at this point in time, the role of public citizen is an appropriate one for the United States to assume. Finally, Part III offers recommendations about how this country should carry out this role responsibly.

I.

Is the United States like any other country? Are its rights and re-

2. See generally LEA BRILMAYER, *AMERICAN HEGEMONY: POLITICAL MORALITY IN A ONE SUPERPOWER WORLD* ch. 2 (1994).

3. *Id.* (advancing this claim).

sponsibilities the same as other countries? Is the most important normative principle of the international order the norm of sovereign equality, or does the normative order recognize legitimate hierarchy? Are state responsibilities symmetric, in that what one state owes to a second is necessarily the same as what the second owes to the first? Or, are there situations where the first owes the second more, or less, than what the second owes to the first? These are the questions about which Americans are confused. We might describe one set of answers to these questions as characteristic of a "public citizen" model of American foreign policy and the other as "private individual."

The private individual vision of the American role sees international affairs as essentially symmetric. No one state has any greater rights or responsibilities than any other. If A owes something to B, B owes the identical thing to A whenever, as a factual matter, the tables are turned. All states are equal; a hierarchy of states is indefensible whether the hierarchy results in greater opportunities or greater responsibilities. No state bears a greater responsibility to further the interests of the system as a whole than any other. No single state bears public responsibilities.

This seems to be the model put forth by international legal norms. The United Nations's Charter recites the fundamental principle of the equality of states. Furthermore, international legal norms, as a general matter, do not differentiate between more and less powerful states. All states are equally obliged to respect one another's sovereignty, to adhere to treaty obligations, and to respect international human rights. Regarding international law, the states are interchangeable. Although states are obliged to adhere to these norms, no one state has a peculiar responsibility to consider the interests of the world community as a whole; each is entitled to further its own self-interest within the confines of those norms without accepting any added responsibilities for the general well-being of other nations.

Aligned against this vision of international politics is the model of public citizen. According to this view, powerful states—particularly, the United States—bear special responsibilities to the world community. They are expected to exercise their power in the public good. Concurrent with these special responsibilities are special powers; there is a right to lead and, in the process of leadership, to do things that are forbidden to other nations. This vision is distinctly asymmetrical and hierarchical. In contrast to the traditional international approach of sovereign equality, this view recognizes that states are not interchangeable, but have specific and distinctive roles.

Although hierarchy is not the traditional international legal vision, there are aspects of international law that cannot be explained in any

other way. The most unmistakable indication of the public citizen vision is that a small number of powers have permanent seats, and also a veto power, on the Security Council. When the United Nations was established, it was understood that this special prerogative was to be accompanied by the responsibility to exercise the veto consistently with the public good and not simply to further the individual power's self-interest. Other indications of a hierarchical view of world power include those institutions that function through some form of weighted voting, such as the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank. Some observers of international politics, of course, think that weighted voting is entirely justifiable, while others disagree. However, justification is not the issue right now. What matters now is that, justifiable or not, the world is not arranged according to a strict principle of sovereign equality. The traditional international law vision of a world of completely equal states is essentially a myth.

Americans have tended to vacillate between recognizing a special role for their country and insisting that the United States be treated no differently from any other. It is no surprise that human beings tend to recognize a special role when that role carries special prerogatives, but to retreat from it when it would carry additional responsibilities. Hence, the self-congratulation at the end of the Cold War, when it seemed that leadership would follow naturally and relatively costlessly from our "sole superpower" status, was not surprising. Furthermore, our retreat when other nations have asked for our assistance—regarding the war in the former Yugoslavia, during the financial crises as Russia started its transition to a market economy, or in the course of the civil war in Rwanda—was to be expected. It is at these times that the American public asks, "Why must we always be the world's policeman?" The question that is rarely, if ever, addressed is how to reconcile the apparent willingness to assume the mantle of authority when American interests are at stake and the costs are low, with our "Why me?" whining when the going gets tough.

The confused American attitude towards international responsibility is nurtured by the unclarity of our relationship with the United Nations. To a certain degree, the United States has been encouraged by the existence of the United Nations to act as though that body is the only forum in which the good of the world community needs to be considered. By envisioning the United Nations as solely responsible for issues of world governance, we have lulled ourselves into complacency regarding our own responsibilities towards the world order. Our confusion starts with an overly literal analogy between domestic government and the United Nations. If we think of the United Nations as an incipient world government, the United States would seem to be one of

the governed like any other nation—an entity with no greater share of responsibility than any other subject.

By analogizing the United Nations to an admittedly imperfect world government, we overlook both the ways that it depends on the great powers' resources as well as the asymmetries and hierarchies that it creates. The United Nations, obviously, was the brainchild of the victorious powers in the second World War, particularly the United States. The conference that led to the establishment of the United Nations took place in the United States; the United Nations's current headquarters is in the United States; and the United States provides a substantial portion of the organization's financial support. The Security Council, without which the organization can take little effective action, is dominated by the United States, which has a permanent seat and, thus, a veto. In recent cases where the organization has acted forcefully, it was largely due to American instigation. Conversely, where the United States has been more willing to look the other way, substantial threats to international order and international human rights have gone unchecked.

This is not to say that other powers have not played a role. The other countries that dominate the United Nations are also great powers, in part because of their financial clout in the organization, but also because they have been politically favored—for instance, with permanent Security Council seats. Although committed in theory to the formal sovereign equality of states, the United Nations has never been, and could never have been, committed to sovereign equality in fact. First, it is hard to imagine that the organization would ever have been formed without a small group of committed and powerful states behind it, supplying the initiative and providing the resources. Second, it is hard to imagine that the organization could take effective action in international problems without powerful states upon which to rely for financial, military, and logistical support.

The formal institutions of world governance greatly depend on the resources of the great powers and respond selectively to their interests and initiatives. The same, however, is true of the less formal institutions of world governance, which international relations specialists refer to as "regimes." Regimes are defined as sets of norms that condition expectations, and therefore behavior, in world politics. The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) is one example. Other examples include the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, world environmental and species conservation agreements, and international

agreements on the protection of intellectual property.⁴ As with the United Nations, these regimes seem to reflect the formal equality of the state actors in the international system. Thus, these regimes encourage us to believe that American rights and responsibilities are the same as those of any other state. However, as with the United Nations, even a cursory look reveals how these regimes are more indicative of hierarchy than equality.

By their nature, expectations are intangible and, therefore, hard to measure. Furthermore, the source of expectations is often correspondingly obscure. However, the inequality of some of these regimes is apparent on their face. The nuclear nonproliferation regime, which allows certain countries to maintain their nuclear weapons indefinitely, is one example. Furthermore, it should be obvious that no set of informal norms stands much of a chance of authoritative acceptance if it is consistently opposed by the powerful states in the system. For years the developing world promoted the concept of a New International Economic Order. These words are almost never heard today. Whatever the moral virtue of appealing for international wealth redistribution and however strongly the developing world may agree and expect that a higher level of international assistance is in order, it simply will not occur as a result of their beliefs and expectations. This is not a consequence of any general principle that norms must be approved unanimously by all sectors of the international community before they become part and parcel of our global system. The point is not symmetric; it is entirely possible that norms adhered to and insisted on by stronger states will take effect eventually against the weaker. That, after all, is what it means to be weak.

The politics of the international community, in other words, is not so different from the politics of domestic governance. It is extremely difficult to secure adoption and enforcement of a set of norms that truly runs against the grain of vested interests. There is, however, a difference of degree. In domestic society, at least in any well established and successfully functioning democratic society, the opportunities are more substantial for a large number of weaker actors to counterbalance a small number of powerful ones. There is an established organizational structure that has appropriated sufficient independent power to be able to throw weight behind the goals of any segment of society that can capture it. In a democratic society, the voters can "throw the rascals out," albeit with a great deal of difficulty; formal mechanisms of demo-

4. Note that although these examples are relatively formalized treaty arrangements, the word "regimes" also includes informal norms and expectations about state behavior.

cratic governance exist for doing so. The institutions of international governance that we currently possess were not created with such independent power and have not acquired it in the course of their existence. Indeed, it was specifically a condition of their creation that they not present a threat to the sovereignty of the states.

For all these reasons, the United Nations and the international regimes that regulate state conduct present little restraint on the dominance of stronger powers, at least in the short run.⁵ To the contrary, they entrench that dominance. Due both to their formal institutional structure and to their informal dependence on great power resources, the existence of such institutions does not import any great levelling of power inequalities. However, their existence does create an illusion of equality that encourages the United States to pass the buck when doing so is to its advantage. Because institutions of world governance exist, it is easy for us to retreat to a role of co-equal state when international responsibilities seem onerous. We can always "leave it in the care of the United Nations." Why should America be "the world's policeman" when that is what the United Nations was designed to do?

A more clearheaded appreciation of our international governance system would recognize, however, the partnership between the United States and the United Nations that currently exists. It is a partnership that places on the United States a significant role as public citizen. The partnership might be analogized, although imperfectly, to the division of authority between the executive and the legislature in domestic politics. The role of the legislature is to make decisions that the executive will carry out; the executive supplies the muscle, and the legislature supplies the decision-making capacity. We should not overstate this division because in any system of domestic governance there is constant pulling and tugging as different branches define their roles. The executive necessarily exercises independent decision-making power when it carries out legislative commands, and the legislative ability to command directly should not be underestimated. The executive in most systems, moreover, possesses substantial power to initiate or veto legislative action.

An ideal, contemporary role for the powerful nations of the world—and the United States, in particular—would be to assume the role of executive officer for the world community at large. The United States is well positioned to help supply the muscle for decisions that a relatively more democratic international political system makes. This does not, in and of itself, solve the issue of the legitimacy of the Ameri-

5. We will return to the question of the long-run implications of such institutions below.

can role. Analogizing the United States to a domestic executive does not deprive it of decision-making power, nor does the analogy relegate the United States to the status of legislative handmaiden, for the reasons just described. In a true democracy, the executive as well as the legislature should be electorally responsible precisely because the executive possesses substantial independent power. The legitimacy issue arises because the United States has acquired its disproportionate political leverage through power and not through democratic means. Perhaps the best that we can hope for in the near future is something akin to an unelected monarch working in conjunction with an elected legislature. As I will argue next, there may be reasons for settling with such a system in the short run.

II.

Observations about disproportionate American power in world politics are so obvious that they border on the banal. However, their implications are not as obvious as it might appear. Generally, they have served as a prelude to some sort of outright condemnation of American "imperialism," and sometimes this is justified. If one started with the typical, although typically unspoken, assumption that international equality was the undisputed norm, no other conclusion would be natural. Pointing out the obvious ways that state power is vastly disproportionately distributed appears to be a criticism because we completely take for granted that the only acceptable arrangement is sovereign equality.

This conclusion does not necessarily follow, however. Once the assumption that only equality is justifiable is examined, it appears that inequality presents potential for advantage. The single most important part of this assertion is probably the word "potential," which tends to be overlooked by those authors who would find advantage in hegemony. My objective is, first, to show that such potential exists, but more importantly, to make some claims about our obligation to capture that potential and to outline the steps that we would have to take to head in that direction.

The most effective way to ensure order and tranquility is governance, but all governance requires some unequal distribution of power. Obviously, police are empowered to do a variety of things, such as carry certain weapons and detain private individuals, that other individuals are not. Legislators have law-making powers that ordinary citizens lack. Judges have the power to resolve disputes and to call upon the state to back those resolutions with force. Although anarchists insist that these advantages can be obtained without a state possessing

coercive power, few are convinced. Most of us believe that domestic order is best, or perhaps only, achieved through some form of coercion.

The apparent difference between domestic and international inequality is that the officials of domestic government have some formal authorization to exercise unequal power. Internationally, there are few if any formal justifications for the unequal distribution of power that exists.⁶ However, because powerful states, and in particular the United States, are not *formally* authorized to exercise the power that they possess does not negate the practical advantages that inequality can provide. Where no formal authorization exists, one must still ask whether the world is a better place by virtue of the leadership of a single powerful actor. The answer seems to be that inequality creates the potential for benefiting the world as a whole.

To offer one example, it seems unlikely that the current regime of nuclear nonproliferation could function if not for the existence and support of several powerful nations. It is certainly not egalitarian; nuclear "have nots" are to be kept indefinitely in this state, while nuclear powers are allowed to retain their weapons for the foreseeable future with only the vaguest of obligations to disarm. Most of us would not conclude, however, that nuclear equality is a preferable solution, because allowing every state to develop nuclear weapons would increase the risk of nuclear terrorism as well as formal nuclear war. The domestic equivalent of nonproliferation would be a country where certain sorts of weapons are prohibited to private individuals and concentrated in official hands. Although unequal, this is a tradeoff that many of us are perfectly happy to make.

The public choice theorists explain the advantages of domination by a single large actor in terms of collective action theory. Where a public good—here, stability and norm observance—is to be produced, each actor in the system has an incentive to free-ride on the compliance of others; a suboptimal amount of the public good will therefore be produced. The problem is reduced if there is a single, large actor in the system who finds it worthwhile to produce the good even if others do not contribute. A large actor may gain enough advantage from production of the good simply by virtue of its size; therefore, the large actor will let the others free-ride.

For example, certain powerful nations found enough advantage in reversing Iraq's conquest of Kuwait that they were willing to undertake the tremendous costs of mounting a military response.⁷ Given the

6. One has to state this proposition in terms of the usual case, because there are some bases for formal inequality; the veto power on the Security Council is the best example.

7. We will return in a moment to the question of how the United States managed to

costs of such an undertaking, the only nations with sufficient incentive would be ones that stood to benefit enough to make the costs worthwhile. Only a very large nation would stand to gain enough to take action by itself; if other smaller nations had to organize to undertake a military response, they would face severe collective action problems. Specifically, why should any small nation contribute if it could free-ride on others' willingness to bear the costs? Absent some scheme of international taxation to compel contributions, which would make small state protestations irrelevant, each small state would be tempted to equivocate strategically and leave the burden to others. This type of reasoning has supported the international relations analysis known as "hegemonic stability theory," according to which the presence of a single, inordinately powerful actor helps to stabilize international political processes.

Once power is centralized and stability is achieved, the question of legitimacy can be addressed. This process of legitimation takes the form of gradually imposing increasingly greater constraints upon the most powerful actors in the system. Historical analogies exist in certain processes of domestic government formation. Most current governments have descended from regimes that were, to some degree, more autocratic. If legitimate government consists of centralized authority that is restrained by principles of democracy and human rights, one must concede that "centralization" of authority often precedes "restraints." The British system of government, for example, developed from a relatively absolute monarchy to a parliamentary democracy through the gradual imposition of democratic constraints upon an essentially authoritarian system. Unification and consolidation of power can be followed by gradual relaxation of autocratic rule.

It is typically impossible to develop overnight and through consent the strong coercive institutions necessary to force compliance with norms. The most beautiful and egalitarian system of laws is worth little unless backed either by some coercive force or by some strongly held consensus about what should be acceptable behavior. Consensus, notoriously, takes time to produce. This is especially true of the sort of deeply held consensus that is required to support a set of norms that calls on actors to depart from immediate self-interest and to respect the claims of others with the confidence that one's own claims will be respected reciprocally. Furthermore, the most straightforward way to produce consensus about norms is to commit them to an actor powerful

pressure other nations into sharing the costs; at issue now is the fact that the United States had no assurances at the time that cost-sharing would eventually come about, and thus effectively took the risk that it would bear the burden singlehandedly. This it was willing to do.

enough to force, persuade, or cajole the constituent actors in the system to comply. Democratic legitimacy typically comes afterwards.

Again, the Persian Gulf War provides an illustration because it shows how dominant powers can be tamed by the practical requirements of effective governance. As noted above, according to public choice theory the largest actors in the system have an incentive to provide public goods even though doing so may allow smaller actors to free-ride. Of course, from the large actor's point of view a better solution is to produce the good and compel the others to contribute. The United States essentially did this during the Gulf War by diplomatically pressuring other nations into making contributions. However, attempts to share the costs have the long-run consequence of redistributing the power to make decisions as well. Other states will only contribute if they are reasonably convinced that what they are contributing to is also in their interests. A state contemplating unilateral action that is to be retroactively funded by other states must always have in mind the possibility of other state's refusing to contribute.

The same phenomenon could be observed historically when autocratic domestic governments attempted to support activities through wide-scale contributions. The English monarchs, for example, eventually found that they could no longer pay the cost of waging war through their private treasuries. For financial support, they turned to a broader group that included the nobles and the bourgeoisie. In the short run, it seemed a good way of financing government activities; in the long run, it had the consequence of increasing popular control over the activities in question.

This historical analogy illustrates two things. The first is that centralization of power does not automatically result in an increase in the public good. Despite some public choice theorists' enthusiasm for the role that dominant actors play, centralization may be a necessary condition, but it is not sufficient. Even though the potential for public order and the general good exists, there is no assurance that the potential will be captured because a monarch's or dictator's hold on the reins of government may only facilitate self-dealing. Although public choice theorists speculate that the existence of a dominant actor creates the possibility for provision of public goods, there is no guarantee that the dominant actor will use its power in such a fair-minded way. Originally, the British monarchy—like the United States until very recently—ignored considerations of the public good, bearing the costs itself and waging war if and only if doing so served its private interests. A second step, some sort of influence by the smaller actors, is needed to ensure that that potential is actualized. Whether the United States will make this transition remains to be seen.

The second point, however, is that even when concentration is employed for selfish purposes, in the long run such concentration tends to erode. It is typically easier to govern with the consent of the governed, because consenting individuals are more likely to obey norms and consent ensures a wider basis of financial support. Furthermore, because it is easier to govern with the consent of the governed, a long-term tendency for autocratic power to be redistributed in a more egalitarian manner is created. This reasoning suggests that the best way to pursue long-range transformation of hegemonic foreign policy is through incremental changes and through the increase in reliance that the dominant power comes to place on weaker states to help in carrying out its purposes. Over the long term, a dominant power's reliance on world approval and world financial support can have a significant democratizing effect.

Both points are illustrated by American foreign policy. The first point is clear; the fact that American concentration creates the potential for public goods production does not, by itself, guarantee that that potential will be fulfilled. Although it likes to see itself as taking on the cost of international goods production single-handedly, the United States has short-range ways of forcing other states to share the cost of what we have determined in advance (and according to our own tastes and values) to be worthwhile public goods. However, in the long run its tendency to rely on outside funding increases other nations' influence on American behavior. Furthermore, its desire to achieve world consensus, by operating through multilateral institutions such as the United Nations, makes the United States more vulnerable to long-term international democratization.

This process surely must hold the key to moving world political relations in a more democratic and legitimate direction. This transformation in the direction of greater dependence on the resources of other nations and on the popular acceptance of other nations provides for a gradual taming of American hegemony and a gradual redistribution of power in a more egalitarian way. It does not seem likely that through sheer force of will the other nations of the world will be able to convince the United States that it should share power. An immediate and sudden return to a totally equal distribution of power presents the problem that no state will be able to enforce international order and stability. The United Nations is unlikely to develop the sort of enforcement capability that would be necessary to enforce international law by itself, and no other formal institution of world governance exists that could perform this function in its place. We have to work with the concentration of power that currently exists, to appreciate the potential that it offers for international stability and public order, and to find

ways to ensure that the coercive potential that exists be exercised in ways that promote the public good rather than the private interests of a single nation.

III.

This brings us to the question of how this transformation is to be brought about, and here, there are two sorts of answers. The first is fairly obvious from the above discussion. The other actors in the world community must continue to attempt to tie American power to the public good. Over time, innumerable small strings can effectively bind even a powerful nation. If the United States continues to behave as though multilateral institutions matter, as it did during the Gulf War and as it has continued to do sporadically since then, they *will* matter. Over time, it will become unthinkable that the United States should act against world public opinion. As to how much time, I would not venture a guess.

Of course, the responsibility does not lie entirely with the other nations of the world, and this brings us to the second set of responses. The United States should recognize its role in ensuring international democratization. To the extent that hierarchy can be justified, it is because this is the only way to ensure order and stability. If there are ways of maintaining stability that allow smaller nations to have an increase in influence over their own destinies, these are paths that the United States has an obligation to pursue. Gradual relinquishment of disproportionate power is morally obligatory where it does not threaten to undermine international governance.

Our present circumstances find us faced with a unique historical opportunity. During the Cold War, the United States felt itself in direct competition with the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union was thought to be more or less an equal competitor, although our perception about the extent of threat it posed vacillated over time. During some periods it was thought that military preparedness had slipped, that Soviet scientific expertise outstripped our own, and that communism was making gains against us in the Third World. At other times, a greater sense of confidence prevailed. However, the overall sense was of a more or less even match. This sense of competition with a roughly equal competitor amplified the sentiment that "all is fair in love and war" and that international anarchy justified adoption of ethically unattractive responses to international threats that could not be safely managed any other way. The United States could justify its private actor attitude towards foreign policy.

This sense of the urgency and entitlement of an exclusive focus on

American national interest has unfortunately persisted, even though the conditions that made this sense most plausible have largely gone away. Of course, no one would claim that no threats to American security have survived the end of the Cold War. However, it trivializes the extent of American insecurity during some periods of apparent Soviet ascendancy to say that such conditions continue to exist. To take one extreme example, nothing resembling the Cuban missile crisis exists at present day. Although there are threats, there is nothing comparable to the fear of nuclear annihilation that underscored American willingness to accept the costs and dangers of its own nuclear buildup. The existence of roughly equal powers, in other words, can make what may at first seem paranoid behavior more plausible.

Under current circumstances, however, behavior that might have seemed reasonable at the height of the Cold War would seem truly paranoid. Although there are threats, they are threats that tend to eat away at American interests fairly slowly; they are threats like the drug trade, terrorism by militant groups, and the flow of illegal immigration. These threats are not so consummately menacing that they authorize violations of deeply held moral principles to forestall them. The bona fide sense of anarchy that pervaded Cold War days made extreme measures more respectable. The far greater level of security we enjoy today gives us more moral room for maneuvering, a freedom of action to comply with basic decency and to turn our back on fears that in a dog-eat-dog world, the ends must surely sometimes justify the means.

Just as the end of the Cold War gave us room to act consistently with our basic moral principles, it also gave us greater responsibility. Take, for example, the case of aid to developing nations. It might have been an excuse at one time that a nation to which we refused assistance had someplace else to look—specifically, the Soviet Union. Or, take the case of our economic embargo of Cuba. When Cubans had another source of aid and trade, our efforts to cut them off were more understandable. The point is that the United States is now in something of a monopoly position. Some of our representatives in Washington seem to take this as an invitation to tighten the noose further. It should be taken as the opposite, however. The fact that the United States is sometimes the only game in town gives rise to responsibilities that did not previously exist.

International law is modelled on an assumption of formal juridical equality, and this unrealistic assumption has been allowed to condition our approach to international responsibility. If we are merely one equal nation among many, we have no greater responsibility to “police the world,” to feed the hungry, or to unilaterally divest ourselves of nuclear weapons than any other. If we are merely equal, it is under-

standable that we feel trapped in an unwelcome security dilemma and find it necessary to conserve our resources for the support of nations that align with us and are our friends when world political disputes arise. But, to the extent that the United States has become preeminent, the security dilemma is unrealistic and our aid policies are inhumane. We have responsibilities to the world that arise out of our new position in a recently reshaped global hierarchy.

To return to the metaphor of public citizen, it is clear that masquerading as just another private actor in the world community is no longer decent and tolerable. Not only is the opportunity for global leadership available, so is the obligation. Americans, perhaps, find it ironic that nations that were once its strongest critics, primarily on the grounds that America intervened too readily, are now decrying its unwillingness to intervene. In particular, some smaller, weaker countries of the South claim that we should take a more activist role in civil wars and regional conflicts in that area. The ground beneath us has shifted, so that intervention, which was formerly a dirty word, is now sometimes envisioned as a benefit. Considering the reconfiguring of international politics, however, we should drop this sense of puzzlement and try to understand what other nations want from us and how much of what they want is actually deserved.

To be a public citizen, the United States should recognize the ambiguities that always attach to the fulfillment of a dual role. Like any public figure in domestic politics, a public citizen in international politics is subject to superficially conflicting responsibilities. In domestic politics, a public citizen is simultaneously a shaper and implementer of the law and also a subject of the law like any other citizen. The fact that someone fills a position of political and social responsibility, whether as an elected official, a judge, a prominent member of the media, or simply a leading commercial figure, does not suggest that he or she is not in many other respects an equal of the ordinary citizen or above the laws that apply to others. The greater power that goes with this public stature carries with it greater moral responsibility. The United States cannot simply pick up its role as public figure when it chooses to and put it down when the role is costly or inconvenient. Until it chooses to relinquish its special empowerments as the world's predominant public citizen, it has responsibilities to act to fill the aspects of that role that do not follow from self-interest.

Into what does all of this translate? Without going into specific prescriptions here, it is possible to spell out general outlines. These are more in the way of attitudinal changes than specific policies to adopt. This is not to say that attitude will be enough. Attitude is clearly not enough, but in the space that remains, I would rather state a general

philosophy of outlook than address the particular problems that we face in 1995. I offer three recommendations: that we be increasingly self-critical, increasingly informed, and increasingly evenhanded.

Self-Criticism

American ideals, as we envision them abstractly, are not really so bad, but we tend to be seriously derelict in the ways that we apply them. I offer three examples. The first concerns American economic assistance to the rest of the world. Polls consistently suggest that Americans overestimate the amount that this country provides to other nations in the form of economic aid. Furthermore, when asked to state how much the United States should offer other countries, Americans typically name a figure that is considerably larger than the amount of aid that is currently given. Although we tend to think of ourselves as a generous and caring nation, the percentage of our economic wealth that we contribute to other nations' economic development is in actuality far lower than many other nations' contributions. Furthermore, much of our foreign aid budget is directed at a few countries that are of strategic or domestic political interest to Americans, rather than being targeted at those countries that could best employ development assistance.

The second example concerns human rights. Again, we envision ourselves as a beacon to the world. In many respects Americans are in fact quite fortunate; there is no point being unduly negative about the political system we enjoy. However, it is also true that the United States has almost uniformly declined to enter into human rights agreements and where it has signed, it has added reservations that make it highly unlikely that we will ever have to change domestic practices. Indeed, it is hard to think of a single alteration that the United States has made in domestic practices in response to international conceptions of human rights. Is it really so likely that we got the answer perfect the first time around on our own and that we have nothing to learn from the experience of the world community? Would such a conclusion square with our perception that we are the most advanced country in the world from the point of view of human rights?

Third, there is the oscillation that has formed the principal focus of this article. We are obviously not looking critically at our own behavior when we vacillate between accepting a leadership role when it suits our interests and retreating into private concerns when leadership seems to be too onerous. It is not asking too much of the American people that they compare their current attitudes to their attitudes two or three years ago. If a positive role in the "new world order" was a

good idea then, it does not cease to be a good thing just because our role cannot be played for free. It is the responsibility of our political leaders and other shapers of public opinion to address this problem. Some of them do so already, but not as many as would be necessary to make the point.

Information

It is virtually a cliché that Americans are not well informed about world politics. Our children do not learn enough geography or world history in school, and American adults pay little attention to world affairs. Someone I know once complained, "Why do the newspapers keep having stories about Yugoslavia? Aren't there enough problems here in the United States to write about?" I have the opposite reaction. It is very difficult to keep abreast of the day-to-day news of any part of the world that is not enjoying the media attention that comes from being in a state of crisis.

This is not the whole of the problem, however. Although the American public may know little about events in other parts of the world, are we entirely confident that our policy makers are doing much better? Certainly our congressional representatives have much better access to information than we do; as in many other areas of policy making, they are probably drowning in information. However, there is a question of the quality of information—perhaps, better put, a question of the way that information is focused—that accompanies the question of quantity. This can be seen by contrasting the way we treat the assessment of the impact that our actions have on foreign nations with the way that we treat the assessment of the impact that our actions have on our environment.

It was not too many years ago that we were entirely haphazard in the way that we investigated the effect of governmental actions on the quality of the environment. This is not to say that absolutely no attention was paid to environmental matters or that there was no good way for our decision-makers to get access to the information that they decided that they needed. Rather, the point is that they were not required systematically to assess the environmental impact of every action as a routine matter. To remedy this situation, we passed a law requiring that certain sorts of governmental actions had to be preceded by environmental impact statements. The point was that environmental assessment had to be a systematic part of every decision that was made because otherwise there was no guarantee that environmental quality would be taken into account. Furthermore, there were procedural requirements about permitting public input and public review of the re-

sulting assessment. If these requirements were not met, judicial challenge was available.

Before the reader shrinks in horror, I should clarify that my recommendation is not that we extend a literally identical requirement to foreign policy decision-making. The costs of the information bureaucracy are great, and although I am in favor of requiring environmental impact statements, I would certainly recognize that this precise analog may or may not be desirable in international decision-making. The contrast is offered more as a starting point for discussion. What would it be like if every time that one of our decision-makers considered taking action that would affect people in other countries, it was necessary first to make a systematic assessment of the likely effect that that action would have?

It is easy to think of areas where including such a requirement would make a noticeable difference in government decision-making: trade policy, the closing of our markets to certain sorts of imports, for example; financial policy, the raising and lowering of interest rates in ways that would affect the international flows of capital; and immigration policy, the institution of a lottery that draws the most educated and productive members of a foreign country to the United States. These are just three examples that immediately come to mind. It is not that extraterritorial consequences are never taken into account when foreign policy decisions are made. It is just that it would be desirable if an obligation to systematically consider all of the ramifications that our actions have on other nations was recognized.

There seems to be something ironic about the fact that we have come to recognize that the impact of our actions on our environment must be taken seriously, but that we have never explicitly dealt with what is, in my mind, an equally strong case for considering the impact of our actions on the citizens of other nations.⁸ Of course, some of our concern for the environment is just self-interest; not all supporters of environmental legislation are bird watchers, hikers, or other nature lovers. Some simply realized that we were going to choke in our own waste if we did not start to do something different. The same could be said about foreign policy. Other countries are, after all, our world environment. When we are inattentive to the effect of our actions on Third World poverty or political instability in neighboring countries, we are just as surely poisoning our environment as if we chose to ig-

8. See Edward N. Luttwak, *If Bosnians Were Dolphins . . . ; Armed Assistance to Bosnia-Herzegovina*, COMMENTARY, Oct. 1993, at 27 (noting that, had the Bosnian Muslims been bottle-nosed dolphins, the world would have been far less willing to allow the Serbs and Croats to slaughter them by tens of thousands).

nore the toxic chemicals being poured into our rivers. Can it really be said that we are entitled to care more about snail darters than the people of Bolivia?

Perhaps the reason that this contrast seems a bit odd is that we expect the people of Bolivia to be able to take care of themselves. They have an ambassador in Washington D.C.; they can protest with the United Nations; they can organize with other nations to attempt to block our actions. In this respect, the people of other nations are certainly far removed from snail darters. However, there are two responses to this undeniable objection. The first is, obviously, that we should not overstate the power of Bolivians to fight back. This brings us back to the special responsibilities that the United States has by virtue of its superpower status. We have to be forthright about the fact that while other nations have the chance in theory to resist, sometimes this resistance is effective and sometimes it is doomed from the start. In particular, protests from certain nations—Israel and Ireland come to mind—are likely to resonate more directly with domestic politics and, thus, have a greater impact than protests from others.

A second point gets back to the way that we pay attention to the protests that are made. We cannot assume that the ambassadors and politicians who react to the United States's actions will be able to present the entire story. I do not mean merely to raise the common-place observation that these ambassadors and politicians are not necessarily representative. In some cases they are, although in these cases they are not—just as some domestic American politicians are more responsive to popular wishes than others. The point is, instead, that we are not entitled to simply listen to a country's representatives and then rest easy in the assumption that if they have not presented an accurate and forceful case, they have only themselves to blame. We tend to see foreign policy as something like the legal ethics of the adversary system. If the client loses, the reason is that the lawyer is inadequate and the client and the lawyer can only blame themselves.

But if what we genuinely care about is the impact that our actions have in other nations, rather than finding excuses for our own ignorance, we will accept some of the responsibility for determining what that impact is likely to be. We will recognize that if some country lacks political clout or the financial resources to mount a politically sophisticated lobbying campaign, it falls to us to find out what we can do about the consequences. I am suggesting that our attitude should be more like that of the judge in the continental legal systems, referred to, perhaps unfortunately, as "inquisitorial" rather than "adversarial." The judge in the continental legal system accepts some of the responsibility to make the case turn out right, even when that means supple-

menting the questioning and presentation of evidence by the parties' chosen counsel. What I am suggesting is that we should act as though we genuinely cared about what we are doing to people outside our borders.

Evenhandedness

The final quality that it would be highly advantageous for a public spirited citizen of the world community to possess is increased evenhandedness. First, note that evenhandedness is a quality that is particularly appropriate for those who play a public role. Although we do not insist that private citizens treat each other as exactly equal—as a private citizen, I am entitled to favor my friends or relatives in many respects—favoritism by those in public roles has rather different moral overtones. To make a legal analogy, one would say that discrimination “under color of state law” is a far more serious matter than discrimination by private individuals.

Evenhandedness sounds as though our nation must be no more inclined to favor its own interests than the interests of other nations, and no more inclined to favor the interests of its allies than the interests of its enemies. In fact, it need not always mean exactly that. Keep in mind the grounds that were just offered for requiring evenhandedness. They had to do with the public role that the United States is currently filling. The reason that the United States can sometimes justify its filling of this role is the public advantages to the global community of having public order.

This rationale suggests that evenhandedness must be consistent with the United States's public role and the logic that underlies it. In particular, power to preserve the public order is a precious resource that should be conserved. This means two things. First, it means that the United States is not required to diffuse its power so that it is no longer capable of acting as a stabilizing force. To carry forward the “policeman” metaphor, we do not require that police disarm themselves in the name of equality. Second, and conversely, whatever inequalities are tolerated must be justifiable in terms of the public goods that they produce. Perpetuation of the United States's power is not an end in itself. To the contrary, it can be at most a means to the desired end of world stability.

Consider the case of nuclear weapons, an example that this article raised earlier. The reason that it is permissible to have a two tiered regime in which some nations are part of a nuclear club and others are not is purely and simply the good of the group as a whole. The advantage to all of discouraging enlargement of the nuclear club are obvious;

furthermore, these advantages are shared widely by the world community and do not accrue solely to those nations that possess the bomb. Yet, the pressures on any particular nation to develop nuclear weapons are severe if hostile nations in the vicinity are doing likewise. Public choice logic suggests, overwhelmingly, that inequality in this situation will serve the public good. The remaining question is how best to make this inequality serve the needs of those nations that voluntarily give up aspirations to nuclear weapons.

"Evenhandedness" means pursuing the good of the community as a whole and distributing the gains achieved this way as evenly as possible. It does not mean cutting off one's nose to spite one's face, although the ideal of equality sometimes seems to suggest that we are better off equally impoverished than unequally comfortable. So understood, evenhandedness does not present a threat to any legitimate American interest. It simply means that consistent with its role as public citizen, the United States is obligated to consider seriously the impact on others.

IV. CONCLUSION

In the present political climate, talk about American responsibility is no doubt whistling in the wind. There is no reason to think that this is the direction that American political opinion will be moving towards. This is unfortunate from a long-term perspective. I am convinced that in the long run, American interest and American responsibility will coincide. In the long run, it will serve American interests that international stability and order was promoted, and that American leadership in doing so was recognized.

In the short run, though, the costs are everything. What matters most is the financial costs and the risks to American lives, coupled with the reasonable fear that the measures under consideration may not turn out to be effective. We were lucky in the Persian Gulf War in that few American lives were lost and most of our objectives were accomplished. The same result is far less likely in situations such as Bosnia; although we should keep in mind that before we acted in the Persian Gulf, success was not assured.

We are not doing future Americans any favors if we fail to take advantage of this opportunity to work with other nations to advance world order. We are also not doing other nations a favor if we hide behind false modesty, failing to become involved because "it is not our responsibility." This is false modesty because the United States has never shown disinclination to become involved when it felt its interests were at stake, and the rest of the world is well aware of this fact. It is

not a favor because where other nations have taken the unusual step of actually inviting United States's intervention, deference to the sovereignty of other nations is not an adequate reason for our failure to respond.

If we were truly to resort to isolationism, we would stop our efforts to affect events in other countries. We would stop our pressure on Colombia to prohibit drug trafficking; we would stop our efforts to open Japanese economic markets; we would put an end to American pressure regarding human rights abuses in Chechnya, Turkey, and China; and we would terminate our pressure on other nations to save the whales, to save the seals, and to save the rhinos. We do not, because we recognize that what goes on in other nations has an impact on what happens here at home and that gives us some claim to take an interest in events that happen there.

By the same token, however, what happens here has implications for the citizens of other nations. The decisions that we make affect the lives of people everywhere around the globe. Indeed, if extraterritorial effects were taken as the indicator of a right to be involved, citizens of other nations would have a much greater claim to influence decisions made in the United States than people here have rights to influence decisions made in other nations. The consequences of the things this nation does are asymmetrical; we affect more greatly other states' affairs than other states' affairs impact us. Unfortunately, we tend to see the latter rather than the former.

There may be reasons to tolerate the asymmetric nature of world relations. It may be unavoidable given the advantages that leadership potentially creates. To find oneself in the position of world leadership, however, does not authorize diverting leadership capacities to a purely private advantage. The benefits of leadership are a public good, to be distributed as widely as possible. Ignoring this responsibility is to our long-run detriment, to the detriment of our children, to the detriment of the other nations' children, and to the detriment of the world as well.